LONDON AT WAR AND PEACE: CRISIS AND RECKONING, 1702-1951

First, let me say what an honour it is to be asked to give this inaugural *London Journal* lecture. I've been an admirer of the *Journal* for many years, and though I've written for it only infrequently – they set a very high bar – it seems to me to be very much what a proper urban studies journal for London should be. Its subtitle, *A Review of Metropolitan Society Past and Present*, remains a relevant aspiration for a multidisciplinary approach to the study of this extraordinary city and I for one would welcome the inclusion of more literary, sociological and political contributions, especially those that take a historical approach to their subject. The mix of special themed issues interspersed among more general volumes has added to the *Journal*'s impact, and the lecture tonight coincides with a special issue on London and the First World War, edited by Stefan Goebbel and myself. This volume of papers arose from a conference organised jointly by the Centre for Metropolitan History – long in close and fruitful collaboration with the *London Journal* – and the Imperial War Museum in March 2015.[1]

In this special issue I've contributed a paper on the legacies to London and the Londoner that it seemed to me had been endowed by the Great War, and because it can be read there I didn't want to repeat it in this lecture tonight. But given the subject matter of the special issue, and given that my own historical interests in the capital have ranged – impertinently and indiscriminately – over the history of the past three centuries, I thought it would be of interest to cast a glance at the meaning of war to London during the whole of that time to try to detect patterns and lessons that might assist in illuminating the bigger picture of London history. Did wars generally, from the War of the Spanish Succession onwards, have a significant influence on London – on its growth on the ground, its trade, its economy more generally, on the lives of its citizens, on migrations in and out? If so, were these effects discernibly similar – not the same of course, but sufficiently similar for historians to expect to find them and so to treat these troubled times for the nation, when the pace and conjunctures of metropolitan existence were at full spate, as rewarding periods of study? Just as important, did wars leave discernible legacies for London in the way that I considered had happened in the years from 1918? That perhaps was the most

difficult question of all, for once historians look for these sorts of aftershock they tend to find them in many places and extending for a very long time – as in David Reynolds's brilliant elucidation of *The Long Shadow* cast by a First World War that seemed to have the Northern Ireland Peace Process and the Siege of Sarajevo among its consequences.[2] Some might think I've fallen into the same mindset in my piece on 'Questions of Legacy' in this new issue of the *Journal*, though I'll leave that to others to decide.

Anyway, that was the ambition I had in mind for this lecture on London at War and Peace: Crisis and Reckoning 1700- 1951. After some anxious months now of thinking about it, and after sitting down to work on it for the past week or two, I now realise just how many problems lie in the way of realising the ambition. The greatest of those, of course, was history. One big problem in looking for patterns and legacies was that there were too many wars impacting on London in the eighteenth century and too few in the nineteenth. War and turbulence in eighteenth-century Britain – the turbulence always at its most invigorating in the metropolis – affected so much of the period from 1700 to 1815 and for some years after, that war and legacy fill the canvas of London life for more than a hundred years. Even those decades less affected by war – the 1720s and 1730s – certainly were turbulent enough, especially the 1730s with its excise riots, its gin riots and its anti-Irish riots, a mini-pogrom that had for a few nights the purpose of driving the Irish out of London. Or we might take the postwar Wilkesite disturbances of 1763-4, direct progeny of war and peace, which were entirely overshadowed by the new Wilkesite dramas of 1768-71, when war had been largely forgotten. War was no doubt one of the drivers of this especially tempestuous century in London's history but war was so pervasive that to distil its special effects is no easy, perhaps no possible, task.

What follows then is something along the lines of informed speculation with the balance between information and speculation occasionally in favour of the latter. We must of course speculate to accumulate, and perhaps this first venture in ordering some thoughts about London and war over the long durée might help others collect some sort of dividend.

Rather than move chronologically and no doubt tediously through one damned conflict after another in the eighteenth century I'll try to stand back from the turmoil of

events and consider the themes that emerge from a longer view. I have no doubt that there are other themes that other historians better equipped than I would be able to discern but I have stuck to those where I feel I have some reasonable footing to make a judgment. They are: the growth of London and its housing supply; industrial dislocation, including the impact of demobilisation; crime and vagrancy; political unrest; and the effects of war on London's minorities and the tendency to xenophobia of the Londoner. I'll say a little about each of these over the period from 1700 to 1785; and then consider the remarkable convergence of all of them in the period of the Napoleonic Wars and their aftermath. From there I'll move smartly through the nineteenth century to more recent times.

First, then, war and the London building cycle. Many of the themes I want to mention have already been identified and considered by London historians over the years, of course, and the question of war impacting on London's growth and its housing market has been no exception. Admirers of the work of the late lamented Leonard D Schwarz will recall his scholarly exploration of 'trends, cycles and wars' in *London in the Age of Industrialization* and his meticulous charting of London building deeds.[3] Indeed there does seem little doubt that war, with its other attractions for capital and its other uses for labour had a stifling effect on building in London. With the Peace of Utrecht of 1713, for instance, some sort of obstruction in the metropolitan building market was plainly discharged and there followed – not in rapid succession but by spurt and slump – the development of Hanover Square, the Ten Acre Close behind Piccadilly, the Harley and Grosvenor Estates and the Berkeley Fields, all until the next war-induced building recession followed in the 1740s. But it is possible I think to exaggerate the impact of war here. The building pulse of London was never stilled altogether, so that for instance, just to the east of where we are tonight, the development of Great Ormond Street, of Queen Square and the streets to the south were all busily in the making during the most energetic years of Marlborough's wars. Similarly, for the Seven Years War, which has generally been seen as holding back London building till the constipation was released, if I can put it that way, by the general peace of 1763: yet this building desert, for instance, saw the construction of the New Road from Paddington to Islington and the City Road from Islington to Moorgate, with the beginning of ribbon development along both, initiatives that alone might well have produced something of a building boom even had the war not ended

when it did. Nor must we forget that the building process in London in the eighteenth century and after was notoriously prone to nervousness, hubris and nemesis and that almost every urban development took an age – frequently a lifetime – to finish, with or without the complications of war: Cavendish Square, showpiece of the Harley Estate, begun in 1719, would only be considered finished in 1769, a fifty-year period that saw by my reckoning thirty-four years of peace and sixteen of war. The path of brick and mortar in London never did run smooth in the eighteenth century.

There is something of the same difficulty when we try to isolate the effects of war on what we might generalise as social dislocation – unemployment and industrial strife, pressures on the poor law, vagrancy and crime. Some of these themes are under-researched, especially the recourse to the poor law in London before 1790 for instance* – after that time of course we have David Green's admirable *Pauper Capital*[4] – and it is always difficult to disentangle the *anxieties* about crime and vagrancy (as expressed in the newspapers and by contemporaries in their letters and diaries) from what was actually happening on the ground. Certain it is that the anxieties were always present, and I charted something of their ups and downs in *London in the Eighteenth Century*:

> In 1702 [at the beginning of the War of the Spanish Succession] robberies and burglaries grew to such a pitch that the arrangements for the City's watch had to be urgently augmented. In March 1712 [as the war was ending] a great scare involved the 'Mohocks', rakes reckless and ruthless who were said to be beating and stabbing respectable citizens of the middling sort, though the whole phenomenon seems to have been largely imaginary. In 1718 [just as a three-year war with Spain was to begin] it was said there were so many thieves in the City that people were afraid to shop or visit the coffee houses after dark 'for fear that ... they may be blinded, knock'd down, cut or

*In fact there is much more available than I gave credit for in the lecture.[5]

stabbed....' A rise in highway robberies led the Middlesex justices to petition parliament for improvements to the watch in 1720, while the war was in progress, and rewards for apprehending highwaymen robbing the mails were doubled to £200 in 1722 [just after it ended]. Then there was a justifiable panic about crime in 1728-29 when the audacity of street robbers was such that coaches were held up during daylight in the main streets and there was apparently a conspiracy to rob the Queen in her coach, all compounded by the gin scare and doubts over the moral impact of *The Beggar's Opera*. Another fright over highwaymen in the main roads to London in 1735-37 seems to have been based largely on the exploits of Richard Turpin, an Essex man with strong links to the East End of London [both of these scares solidly in the years of Walpole's long peace]. The City Corporation petitioned the King in 1744 [as the war with Spain was about to bring in France too] for assistance in suppressing '"divers confederacies of great numbers of evil-disposed persons, arm'd with bludgeons, pistols, cutlasses, and other dangerous weapons...."' Then at mid-century followed another great crisis of 1749-52 [at the end of what had now become the War of the Austrian Succession] when robberies and atrocities of one kind or other seemed daily occurrences in the streets of London and when the prisons, it was said, were packed with footpads and highwaymen: 'think what shambles this country is grown!' wrote Horace Walpole in March 1752; 'One is obliged to travel even at noon as if one was going to battle.' The panic of those years would not be repeated. Even so, in the second half of the century there were great alarms about 'Murders, robberies, many of them attended with acts of cruelty...never perhaps more frequent about this city than' in late 1761 [during the Seven Years War]; 'Villainy...now arrived to such a height at London, that no man is safe in his own house' in 1772 [a year of peace]; 'the town abound[ing] with desperadoes' through 1781-82 [during the American War] and again in 1786 [three years after it had ended]; and in every year that followed criminals and their depredations filled columns in the daily newspapers.[6]

The great panic of 1748-53 has been, since I wrote that, forensically analysed by Nicholas Rogers.[7] Despite my sceptical nature I accept that the 'crime wave' of these years, as we would now call it, does seem real enough, although the extent to which

anxiety in itself produced more newspaper reports and therefore more charges at the Old Bailey, on which so much of our knowledge of eighteenth-century London low-life depends, can never satisfactorily be resolved. The context of course was demobilisation of soldiers and sailors with the coming of peace, and demobilisation is Rogers's great driver of discontent. But in fact the numbers demobilised were much less in 1748-9 than in 1712-13, 1763-4 and 1783-4,[8] so demobilisation in itself did not necessarily produce at other times the problems Rogers found at mid-century.

The economic dislocation familiar at the end of all wars – slumps in industries like tailoring, shoemaking, shipbuilding and other riverside trades and so on, and a concomitant glut in the labour market caused in part by returning sailors and soldiers – was sure enough apparent in each of these periods. Postwar industrial discontent was most notable perhaps among the Spitalfields weavers in 1763-5, aggrieved in large part by the restoration of imports of French silk, banned during wartime. These were indeed heady days of riot, the Duke of Bedford's house in Bloomsbury Square resembling a besieged garrison protected by soldiers from the Horse and Foot Guards. But then industrial discontent was endemic throughout the century in London. And although we might try to stretch our postwar 'crisis and reckoning' after the Seven Years War to 1768, when the Thames-side coalheavers provided some extraordinary drama – 'Of all the tumults', thought Horace Walpole reflecting later on the times he had lived through, this was 'the fiercest and most memorable'[9] – we are in danger once more of attributing to war and its aftermath more than the history will bear. We need only reflect on the greatest popular crisis of all in eighteenth-century London, the Gordon Riots of June 1780 – *in* a war but not *of* it – to accept that the disruptions of warfare in the eighteenth century stamped no indelible or even strongly-marked pattern of strikes or riots, or even of crime and vagrancy, on London or on the Londoners in any meaningful sense.

A similar story might be told of another feature accompanying war and peace in London's eighteenth century, as in many later conflicts whether they involved Britain or not. The dislocations of war drove displaced persons to London, admixing the metropolitan population with fresh or enlarged minorities. This was an unwelcome event for most Londoners, notoriously intolerant to foreigners as they remained throughout modern history until – well, until when, perhaps within just the last sixty or so years, though some would dispute even that. In eighteenth-century London a

foreigner was a Frenchman whether French or not and the net effect was that xenophobia was a feature of London life whether in wartime, postwar or peace. Popular resentment occasionally flared up. There were riots against 'foreign Varlets', or a French acting company, at the Little Theatre, Haymarket, in October 1738, 'a sharp and bloody battle', all in front of the French ambassador – the nations then were at peace; and at the same place in November 1749, when aristocratic supporters of the 'French Strolers' drew swords and wounded some of the opposition; Nicholas Rogers links this event into his postwar 'Mayhem' though as he also points out it had local political causes too.[10] In 1744, during the war itself, a planned meeting of footmen protesting about their Swiss and French fellows turned into a riot against the Bow Street magistrate when he ordered they be locked out of the meeting room. And French servants – still kept happily in their places during the Seven Years War, it seems – were frequent butts on the London stage: '"you will find al de doors dat was shut in your face as footman Anglois, will fly open demselve to a French *valet de chambre*"', and so a Yorkshireman turns French to get a job in London in Samuel Foote's *The Liar* of 1762.[11] The association of the French with aristocratic insouciance, their taking the Englishman's roast beef from the very tip of his tongue, their general untrustworthiness as spies in time of war, all combined to make a Frenchman justly nervous on the streets of London, as Pierre Jean Grosley found in the 1760s.

> My French air, notwithstanding the simplicity of my dress, drew upon me, at the corner of every street, a volley of abusive litanies, in the midst of which I slipt on, returning thanks to God, that I did not understand English. The constant burthen of these litanies was, French dog, French b----; to make any answer to them, was accepting a challenge to fight; and my curiosity did not carry me so far.[12]

It does seem likely though that war did make London seem more foreign to its citizens. It brought foreigners from further afield than France, including from Britain's burgeoning empire. Around March 1750 there was trouble over thirty-one lascars, Indian seamen, who had been part of the crew of a Royal Navy vessel, the *Medway's Prize*, a French ship captured in the East Indies in early 1744. The *Medway's Prize* seized a Spanish ship, the *Sainta Catherina*, or so it was named in the London newspapers. The *Medway's Prize* was sailed to England by its partly

lascar crew and all its sailors were paid off at Deptford, where the ship was moored to be received by its new owners, in August 1749.

The lascars expected prize money from the Spaniard they had helped seize. They said they were assured of it and on the strength of that promise found it easy to procure board and lodging somewhere along the river. But the prize money never materialised and one of their creditors, almost certainly a publican or lodging-house keeper, lost patience and had twenty-one lascars arrested and carried to the Marshalsea. Another ten lascars from the *Medway's Prize* remained at large, sustaining themselves by begging in the streets. All this was a huge embarrassment to the Admiralty who tried for months to persuade them to be shipped back to the East Indies, but they refused, joined the ranks of their fellow Lascar-beggars when they were freed from the gaol, and did indeed win their prize money after achieving some notoriety and sympathy on the streets of London, lascars then still an unusual sight in the centre of town as against the riverside districts.[13]

Similarly, the dog days of the American Revolutionary War and its conclusion in 1783 brought to London probably some hundreds of black loyalists who had served in the land forces or navy. They were ill-connected and ill-equipped to be useful in a metropolitan labour market temporarily dislocated by a postwar slump in demand, made worse by demobilization. Unable to find work these newcomers soon became 'alarmingly conspicuous throughout the streets as common beggars', as the anti-slavery campaigner Granville Sharpe put it at the time.[14] Others took to crime. Until the 1780s black people appear in the Old Bailey Proceedings to be victims of crime as much, if not more, than perpetrators. From the summer of 1783 that changes, and blacks accused of property crime become more common, though the number of 'negroes' coming to trial remained very small – just five identified as such in 1783-4, for instance.

The condition of 'the black poor' after 1783 drew considerable attention from an anxious London middle class. Anxiety and philanthropy combined in 1786 to project an expedition to settle black Londoners in Africa – hardly resettle, for almost all had been born into slavery in the Caribbean or America. Motives were mixed. For some philanthropists the project was largely a matter of humanity, giving blacks new hope away from a city that seemed unable to grant them either dignity or a livelihood. For

others, and for the government that subsidised the venture, humane motives were diluted by the desire to rid London of a potentially disruptive problem. For the blacks in general, though there were some doubters, the proposal was broadly welcomed, Olaudah Equiano for a time playing a part in its practical arrangements. The voyage to establish Freetown, the brainchild of Granville Sharp and the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, sailed from London on 8 April 1787, with more than 400 blacks and 'about sixty Europeans, chiefly women' on board.[15]

Those events at least, both the 'obstinate lascars' of the early 1750s and the black newcomers of the early 1780s, could justly be counted among the reckonings of war for London and the Londoners. But in general, throughout the eighteenth century until the very end, it is difficult to argue, I think, that there were any longer-lasting effects from war on London or London life. What effects there were seemed often not out of the ordinary for London; and those that were extraordinary lasted but a short time in the context of the century as a whole.

Can the same be said when the forces of crisis and reckoning converged most powerfully, in what contemporaries frequently called 'the Great War' that began in 1793 and ended finally in 1815? The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars without doubt had a wide impact on Londoners for the whole of that period – wider than any war before and wider than any war would have for a hundred years to come. After a decade of peace from 1783, this – the most existentially threatening of Britain's conflicts during the long eighteenth century, carrying as it did in aggravated form the threat of invasion – saw the convergence of every element of crisis and brought in its train what appeared to be the most threatening of political reckonings. But it was in the disruption to life on the continent, and the quite new patterns of migration to London they brought about, that we can at last discern a war-produced game-changing alteration in London's fortunes that lasted for generations. This was truly a long shadow, in this case perhaps better described less as shadow than as a great *beacon*, for London.

The migrant patterns of this 'Great War' were complex and not all of them had a lasting effect. Internal dissension in revolutionary France predictably brought a train of refugees to London even before war began. By the summer of 1790 Horace Walpole noted how Richmond was 'brimful both of French and English', the first

wave of an increasingly frantic migration as the terror in France grew yet more merciless. In September 1792 the starving haggard condition of those arriving was such that it was said poor women seeing them in the London streets spontaneously gave all they had in their pockets as they passed by. Charitable committees were established, one of which by March 1796 was maintaining 6-7,000 refugees with government help. But the doles to individuals were so small that 'both Laity and Clergy' had pawned or sold all spare clothing and even 'the beds from under them'. Pregnant women were reported having to give birth unattended by medical assistance on 'straw, in unfurnished houses, without food or fire, and almost without clothes.' 'Many have died,' it was said at the time. The miserable condition of the French refugees continued into the new century, even creating a shabby new émigré suburb at Somers Town. It was unsympathetically nicknamed Botany Bay by the Londoners, some of whom could not forget that these were foreigners and French first and refugees second. Walpole recorded in March 1793 that 'Some windows of the poor French émigrés at Richmond have been broken': 'the mob declared it was for having murdered their King.'[16]

But like most French migrations apart from the Huguenots, London was but a temporary home for those who survived it, and many refugees drifted back to the homeland after the restoration of the monarchy in July 1815. The same seems likely to be true of the Dutch migration (including the Dutch royal family) in the late 1790s and the Peninsular migrations of Spaniards and others from 1808. A more permanent migration, though involving fewer migrants than the French, was caused by the disruption to agriculture in French-occupied parts of Italy towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars. It brought many young men to the streets of London as figurine sellers and exhibitors of 'learned mice and chattering monkies', as John Thomas Smith noted around 1816-17, forerunners of later war-driven Italian migrations in the 1860s especially.[17]

But the most significant migration to London of this Great War was at once more geographically disparate and functionally homogeneous. It was the Napoleonic Wars that decisively cast London as the centre of world finance. This was a European, not an imperial, creation. Invasion, plunder and chaos brought money-men in droves from across occupied Europe to London. The occupation of Amsterdam in 1795 destroyed overnight what till then had been the world's 'leading international financial

centre' – I'm citing David Kynaston here – and quickly entrenched its removal to and replacement by the City of London.[18] Nathan Mayer Rothschild moved from Frankfurt to London in 1798, establishing himself as a Manchester merchant shortly after but moving back as a financier to the capital in 1808;[19] by the end of the wars or shortly after he had been joined by Frühling from Bremen, Gőschen from Leipzig, Schrőder from Hamburg, all household names in the nineteenth-century City, all gifts of Napoleon to London, all part of an enduring European legacy of these troubled years. Despite setbacks in the twentieth century, one can argue that the City has never looked back from its revolutionary realignment of 1795-1815.

No other of the crises of these years, great though they were, and no other element in the troubled legacy of the war, sharp and bitter as it proved, was so long lasting for London. There were of course the customary alarums that were present in war and peace throughout the century. Certainly these French wars, as usual, brought many building projects to a halt: so, for instance, the Adam brothers' Fitzroy Square, begun in 1789, part finished by 1792, abandoned in 1793, proved a fatal hazard to the London carriage-driver and pedestrian for some years to come and was not finally finished until around 1835. Such instances could no doubt be multiplied many times. Among those houses already built, high taxation, dear credit and woes of trade left many West-End mansions untenanted during the war.[20] And we also find in these years a phenomenon present markedly in both the great wars of the twentieth century: the striking prosperity of theatres and other entertainments in the West End of London as the capital was filled with the peripatetic youth of the nation, passing through on their way to war.[21]

There may though be one further exception to these short-term shocks, though this is more speculative than the financial positives of the war for London. For the immediate postwar crisis – the demobilisation of perhaps two hundred thousand soldiers and sailors, the sudden collapse of war-fuelled industries – fed into and perhaps stimulated an entirely new age of curiosity about the social condition of the London poor that did not abate for the rest of the nineteenth century. This age of curiosity begins promptly in 1815 with what would soon be a torrent of parliamentary inquiries into almost every social problem manifesting itself in London. It is not that there had never been such inquiries before. But they had been few and far between and narrowly focused, dominated by the need to suppress those crimes for which the

poor were considered responsible, or to reduce the cost of the poor law on London's householders of the middling sort. The travails of the poor, their health, housing, education and welfare were literally, like the poor themselves, beneath contempt in the eighteenth century. Now, from 1815, the London poor were the subject of inquiries into mendicity, crime and the police, the state of the London prisons, the industrial condition of the Spitalfields weavers and others, the increasing burdens of the poor law, the education of the poor and so on.

Some urgency, perhaps some panic, was injected into this spirit of curiosity by political radicalism. Reformist politics had been largely forced underground by legislative repression, arrests, trials, even executions during the war years, but it broke out into popular discontent in the first five or six years of peace. Popular radicalism did not only affect London, of course, but in many ways it was at its most extreme – we might say, its most insane – in the metropolis. The threatening manifestations of discontent over the Corn Laws and the high price of bread in 1815, the Spa Fields riots and the attack on the Tower of London in December 1816, the large protest meetings agitating for parliamentary reform of 1817, 1818 and 1819; then the moment of madness in Cato Street in 1820, with its bloody retribution at Newgate; the riots over Queen Caroline's trial shortly after, and finally riot's last bow with street disorders momentarily reminiscent of the Gordon Riots as the authorities tried to stop the Queen's coffin from being carried through the City in August 1821. All these turmoils kept the condition and the temper of the London poor in full view of a nervous metropolitan elite. And all these tribulations it seemed had sprung from the war and the dislocations that peace had brought. It is not difficult to identify a sharp reckoning here, lasting six turbulent years at least.

What then for the remaining eighty years or so of the nineteenth century, when wars in which the British people were wholeheartedly engaged were so scarce? I'm conscious of course that British colonial wars never stopped and that some had an impact on the Londoner – through Jingoism in the music hall and street culture in particular – though with little effect I think on the themes we have been considering tonight. And, on the other hand, I'm conscious that Continental Europe was in turmoil for much of the nineteenth century and that each European war or revolution brought refugees and economic migrants to London in large numbers, occasionally in very large numbers if we think of the trouble in the Pale of Settlement from 1881 and the

hundred thousand Jewish migrants it brought in its train. The steady growth of multicultural London through these European migrations in particular was one of the grand narratives of the nineteenth-century metropolis. Indeed, similar influences have been at play, with even more dramatic results, in the seventy years or so since the end of the Second World War, where brutal civil and regional conflicts in the Middle East and Africa in particular have impacted greatly on migration patterns to London. But it is the conjuncture of influences of *London* at war that I'm devoting time to tonight, where the city and its people played a part in war and felt the consequences of that involvement. If we were to throw the net wider then the consequences of war on London could most certainly be enlarged.

What then can we say of London at war in the nineteenth century? Where London is not at war – in the narrow sense that I've defined it here – then sure enough there can be little of crisis and reckoning to lay at its door. But – and this is admittedly very speculative indeed – we might pause for a moment to reflect on the Crimean War and its possibly momentous effect on London. I don't mean merely the Crimean Memorial to the Brigade of Guards by John Bell in Waterloo Place, to my untutored eye one of the finest of all London's public statues. I mean the greatest single administrative overhaul of London government of the century, which had such a protean influence on the modernisation of London – the Metropolis Local Management Act of 1855. Is it stretching too far a point to see in the fury of discontent over the mismanagement of the war and the leadership of the army, in the revulsion against aristocratic elites and archaic hereditary rule that generated leaders in *The Times* and produced Dickens's Circumlocution Office, in the passion for improvement that established the Civil Service Commissioners in May 1855 and the influential Administrative Reform Association that same month, the swift passage of the Act that heralded a transformation in London local government? True there were other factors in play – the Commissioners who reported on the City Corporation had advocated a not dissimilar reform in May 1854 and the third outbreak of cholera in London had ended that autumn – but the overwhelming contemporary political and public appetite for reform is obvious in the arguments made by Sir Benjamin Hall in the House of Commons, based almost entirely on arguments of democracy, efficiency and financial control rather than public health, when he introduced the Bill's second reading in March 1855.[22]

The other nineteenth-century war with a significant effect on London and the Londoner was the South African War of 1899-1902. This of course was an imperial war and as such, it seems to me, of far less significance to the metropolis than the great European conflicts – even those in which Britain had played no active part – of the preceding century, though I appreciate some might find that a provocative statement. It is difficult to see that the metropolitan excitements of this fin-de-siècle imperial moment had enduring implications for either London or the Londoner. The concluding words of this moment's historian, the admirable Jonathan Schneer, on the immediate aftermath of the Khaki Election of 1900 strongly hint at the absence of longterm consequences here. The election, he tells us, 'serves as a photograph might'. 'But then the moment passes, the photograph blurs and dissolves, and the great city reawakens. Life rushes onward. London is a process. Already we may discern, in dim outline and in the distant future, an equally complex, fluid, and unfinished postimperial metropolis.'[23]

So much, we might think, for Imperial London. But that 'postimperial London' had to get through two world wars first. And it is here, in the twentieth century, that war and London's history become inextricably, fatally intertwined; so much so that Londoners were living with the consequences of war – certainly till the end of the century and arguably here and now, seventy years on. Why did this happen? What made the relationship of modern London and war uniquely different in the twentieth century compared to the two hundred years of conflict that came before?

First, it was the totalising, all-embracing nature of these world wars for London and the Londoner. War seemed to magnify or intensify the unique character that set London apart from the nation and made the metropolis and life in it of a different nature from even the other great British cities. War meant more for London than anywhere else in the country. We might let the experience of the First World War stand for both this century's wars by way of generalisation. The impact was immediate and irreversible so that within days of 4 August 1914 one Bloomsbury resident thought she was living in 'an altogether new London'.[24] There were the queues of volunteers, of course, and the men in khaki, and the horses impounded from everywhere for the war effort, all the general excitement of a world turned upside down almost overnight. But the change continued to intensify, week by week, month by month: the blackout in operation from September; queues of ambulances

taking the war wounded to London's hospitals both civil and military; the railway stations bringing Londoners within weeping distance of the Western Front; the industries of London cannibalised for manufacturing the weapons of war, with everyone even the most seemingly incapable, set to work; the ministries and banks and offices filled with women workers, whole districts of the City and Whitehall, previously male domains, now feminised to an astonishing and revolutionary degree that shocked contemporaries; the YMCA hostels and canteens, the brothels of the Waterloo Road, the scores of cinemas in every London district that had now become an irreplaceable aid to at once understanding the war and forgetting it; the West End shows that every serviceman heard about and as often as not experienced, for all spent their leave for some time in London; the newly foreign feeling from Belgian refugees and the citizen soldiery of the dominions and of the USA who became ever more visible as the war went on; the list of changes was infinite. London was at the epicentre of this war that changed everything and everything about London changed as a consequence, at least for a time.

Second, of course, London was itself on the front line. As the hub of the imperial war effort the Port of London had been identified by the German Admiralty as a legitimate war target by January 1915. In fact, bomb aiming was so primitive that the river could not be effectively targeted, but metropolitan London could and given the place of the capital in the machinery of war it too could also be seen as a legitimate target, despite the anguished complaints about the barbarity of bombing 'non-combatants'. In this war there really was no such thing. The impact of this aerial warfare compared to the Second World War was of course insignificant, though not to the seven million Londoners who experienced it. Between May 1915 and May 1918, Zeppelins and bombing planes killed 668 persons in the Metropolitan Police District and injured 1,938 more. They caused damage to property to the value of over £2 million. The morale of Londoners was never destroyed and the capacity of the great city to wage war was affected not at all. But the nerves of many were shaken, their patience was wearied and their tempers frayed by a bombardment that, although in itself sporadic, had been an ever-present anxiety since the first winter of the war.[25]

The bombing of course came to an end, and not all of the other changes brought about by the war lasted. Some faded away or went into reverse almost from the moment the maroons sounded the Armistice. But a lot did not. I argue in the

Journal's special issue that, among other things, the war saw the end of Victorian levels of poverty and a marked improvement in life-chances for the general run of the lowest paid; an allegiance between London's workers and the Labour Party that was cemented in the war years and whose longterm impact can still be felt – or could; a shift of the industrial weight of the metropolis westwards in a way that had a direct impact on the geography of suburban growth once building began again in the interwar years; a linking together in the fortunes of west London and the aeroplane in ways too that, for good or ill, are still with us; and, despite reverses, the place of women in the metropolitan workforce was transformed for ever.[26]

There were ill effects too: wartime xenophobia led to the forcible eviction of London's German minority and an excess of intolerance saw some race-rioting in ports (including the East End of London) in 1919 and a subsequent restrictive immigration regime that set back the nineteenth-century growth of multicultural London for a generation. But on balance, most effects of the First World War were strongly positive for the Londoner, at least working-class Londoners.

On the other hand, the impact of the Second World War on the capital was much more mixed. The bombing, of course, was so much more destructive, and although the point was frequently made at the time that the Luftwaffe was doing the job of slum clearance that government and local authorities should have been already undertaking, who can now be confident about the virtues of postwar housing redevelopment in the East End and elsewhere. The war too gave a blank cheque or something like it to those, led by a vociferous town planning lobby, who had been clamouring some years before war was declared for the decentralisation of people and jobs from London. The war and the bombing were a gift to those who complained that London was too big and economically thrusting for the good of the nation as a whole and although the London plans, potentially so destructive to the nature – we might call it, as some did, 'the soul' – of London were never actually implemented in all their overreaching ambition, planned deindustrialisation and the removal of offices, shifting jobs and people wholesale from London were begun as a conscious legacy of the war. They took decades to have their full effect, sometime in the mid-1980s, when the population of Greater London was over two million less than 1939 (or now) and when the discovery of the plight of the inner city, left to the poor and elderly and the migrant newcomer, at last gave a jolt to the policymakers of

central and London government. Prominent within this deindustrialisation was the demise of the upper port, made redundant by roll-on roll-off containerisation technologies that also had their roots in the Second World War. Some of these impacts had global origins and were global in scale, among them the movements of people worldwide; the beginnings of some of these movements also lay in the dislocations brought about by the Second World War and though they later would be valued for what they brought to London and the Londoner the path of tolerance and acceptance tending to gratitude was a long and troubled one.[27]

It is in the twentieth century then that war has had defining effects on London history and on Londoners' life chances. War was omnipresent in the eighteenth century but its effects are difficult to disentangle from a hundred years of turbulence and were in any event likely to have been evanescent. With the exception of the extraordinarily positive and long-lasting impact on the City of London of the Napoleonic Wars and the European migration they provoked; and perhaps too with the exception of the lengthy reverberations of London's socio-political crisis of 1815-21, Britain's wars were too remote to impact greatly on London's history. That impact would come later, in the years stretching across the period from 1914 to 1951 and beyond. And it would be so great that the London we live in today can be thought of still as the product of that metropolitan century of total war.

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[1] See *London Journal*, Vol. 41 No. 3, November 2016.
[2] D. Reynolds, *The Long Shadow. The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (London: Simon and Shuster, 2013) 404, 393.
[3] L. Schwartz, *London in the Age of Industrialization, entrepreneurs, labour force and living conditions, 1700-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 80-1.
[4] D. Green, *Pauper Capital. London and the Poor Law, 1790-1870* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).
[5] See, in particular, the recent work of Jeremy Boulton; A. Levene, *The Childhood of the Poor. Welfare in Eighteenth-Century London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); T. Hitchcok and R. Shoemaker, *London Lives. Poverty, Crime and the Making of a Modern City, 1690-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. I'm grateful to David Green and Charlie Turpie for advice on this point.
[6] J. White, *London in the Eighteenth Century. A Great and Monstrous Thing* (London: Bodley Head, 2013) 390-1.
[7] N. Rogers, *Mayhem. Post-War Crime and Violence in Britain, 1748-53* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012).

[8] Schwarz, *Industrialization*, 98-9.
[9] H. Walpole *Memoirs of King George III* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 3 Vols., 2000), IV, 21-2.
[10] Rogers, *Mayhem*, 72ff.
[11] S. Foote, *The Liar* (London, 1762), Act I Sc II.
[12] P.J.Grosley *A Tour to London; or, New Observations on England, and its Inhabitants* (London: Lockyer Davis, 2 Vols., 1772) I, 84.
[13] J. White, *Mansions of Misery. A Biography of the Marshalsea Debtors' Prison* (London: Bodley Head, 2016), 130-2.
[14] P. Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp*, *Esq. composed from his own Manuscripts, and other Authentic Documents in the Possession of his Family and of the African Institution* (London: Henry Colburn, 2 Vols., 2nd edn. 1828), II, 4.
[15] See White, *Eighteenth Century*, 135.
[16] Ibid., 143.
[17] L. Sponza, *Italian Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Realities and Images* ((Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988) 23-4.
[18] D. Kynaston, *The City of London. Vol. I A World of Its Own, 1815-1890* (London: Chatto and Windus Ltd., 1994), 23, 56-7. On the generality of war for Britain see J. Uglow, *In These Times. Living in Britain Through Napoleon's Wars* (London: Faber and Faber, 2014).
[19] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*(online version), Nathan Mayer Rothschild 1777-1836, accessed 1 November 2016.
[20] Uglow, *In These Times*, 378.
[21] Ibid., 353, 492, 495.
[22] *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates, Third Series, Vol. 137, cols. 699-729, 16 March 1855, speech of Sir Benjamin Hall on Metropolitan Local Management.
[23] J. Schneer, *London 1900. The Imperial Metropolis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 263.
[24] J. White, *Zeppelin Nights. London in the First World War* (London: Bodley Head, 2014), 37.
[25] Ibid., 252.
[26] J. White, 'London in the First World War: Questions of Legacy', *London Journal*, Vol. 41 No. 3, November 2016, 313-27.
[27] Some of these issues are discussed at greater length in J. White, *London in the Twentieth Century. A City and Its People* (London: Viking, 2001), especially chs. 1, 2 and 5.